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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an ethnographic study of how fundamentalist Christian parents new to home schooling are socialized to norms, beliefs, and values of the Christian home schooling organizations with which they are affiliated. Research involved participant observation and interviews with "home schoolers" and educators over an 18-month period. Half of the children from the 16 families (including 23 parents) interviewed had never attended school; those from remaining families had withdrawn from public or private schools. Thirteen families described themselves as conservative Christians; other families had no religious affiliation. Home schoolers' shared beliefs and practices were analyzed from documents, newsletters, observation, and interviews conducted with state and local education officials involved with home schooling. Interview results show that parents generally learn about home schooling through people, events, or media that are integral to their established lifestyles. Parents' decision to teach their own children is rarely a culmination of long and careful deliberation. Many told of emotionally committing themselves to the decision soon after learning that this would be possible. According to interviewees, "independent" and "intuitive" decisionmaking about curricular materials and other educational matters characterized their early days of home schooling. (CJH)

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Becoming Home Schoolers

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Becoming Home Schoolers

The literature describing parents who chose to teach their children at home is sparse, and in the few articles that have been written about why these parents are teaching at home and how they are doing it, the analysis often begins at some point well after the parents have begun home schooling. This paper attempts to fill the gap left by these articles by describing how parents first decide to forgo traditional, school-based education and how, having decided, they learn to become home schoolers.

The Study

The study involved participant observation at state, regional, and local meetings of home schoolers over a period of eighteen months. A state-wide home education organization met semi-regularly to disseminate legal and other information, to hear a special speaker, or to view materials. Regional meetings were called occasionally to facilitate communication among home schoolers in the same geographic area. Many home schoolers also met together locally as "umbrella schools" they had formed to legally qualify as private schools under state statutes. I met most often with Central Christian Academy, an "umbrella" school of fifteen to twenty families in one of the state's larger cities. I also periodically met with a second local group that was just organizing in a nearby community.

Besides these state, local, and regional meetings, I also accompanied home schoolers as they met with representatives from

other education groups to discuss legislation, as they conducted informational meetings in which they explained home schooling to others, and as they attended public functions at which educational or other family concerns were discussed. I attended a total of 16 meetings at these various levels. Additionally, I transcribed, coded, and analyzed audio tapes of four additional state meetings that took place before I began the study and nine national meetings of home schoolers that I could not attend.

I conducted interviews with a total of 23 parents from 16 home schooling families. The children in half of these families had never attended school; children from the remaining families had withdrawn from public or private schools to begin home schooling. Thirteen of these families described themselves as conservative Christians, and the other three families had no religious affiliation. All the interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed verbatim.

I conducted ten additional interviews with state and local education officials and others who were involved with monitoring or regulating home schooling in the state. Included in this series of interviews were several meetings with the president of the state home schooling organization and with another of the officers of the state group. Additionally, I interviewed both individuals who directed the Governor's Office of Non-Public Education during the course of my study. I also interviewed the assistant state attorney general who had prosecuted several of the home schooling cases that had reached appeals court and a lawyer who had defended several families who were taken to court. Finally, I interviewed

representatives from several public education lobbying groups about their organization's perceptions of home schooling. All of these interviews were also audio-taped and transcribed verbatim.

I also collected and analyzed a variety of documents. I read approximately 5 years of back issues of two nationally circulated home-schooling newsletters: *Growing without Schooling* edited by the late John Holt, and *The Home Educator and Family Report* edited by Raymond and Dorothy Moore. I also recieved the newletters of the state organization and the information packets that the state group gave to legislators when lobbying. I subscribed to the newsletter issued by Christian Liberty Academy, a popular supplier of home schooling curriculum materials, and I also read approximately 15 books on home schooling or more general educational issues recommended in these newsletters or by the parents I met. I monitored press reports of home schooling in the state and received newsletters from several education lobbying groups that I expected would take a stand on home education if the issue reached the legislature. I also reviewed the files of a lawyer who had defended several home schooling families that had been taken to court. During the course of the study, I also built rather extensive files of correspondence from individuals active in home education at the national, state, and local levels, and from others engaged in research on home education.

From this data, I categorized and analyzed the home schoolers' shared beliefs, practices, and interpretations of events and experiences. Particular attention was given to stated and implied

assumptions about the goals of education, the nature of learning, the nature of teaching, and the appropriate relationship between the home and the school in the education of children. This paper will discuss one element of this analysis and one segment of the population studied. Specifically, the paper describes how the fundamentalist Christian parents new to home schooling are socialized to the norms, beliefs, and values of the Christian home schooling organizations with which they are affiliated. In short, the paper discusses how parents raised on traditional schooling become home schoolers.

Results

Starting Out

Learning about home schooling

The parents generally first learned about home schooling through people, events, or media that are parts of their established lifestyles. Many of the Christian parents first heard home schooling advocate Raymond Moore interviewed on Christian radio or television programs that are part of the family's regular viewing and listening (especially James' Dobsons' "Focus on the Family" radio show or "The 700 Club" television program). Some saw home schooling debated on the Phil Donahue television show. Other parents learned of home schooling through organizations such as La Leche League (a support group for nursing mothers) or through articles on home schooling in child-rearing, alternative lifestyle or Christian magazines. Several parents had personal experience with

learning at home: one mother I interviewed had done her high school course work at home through a correspondence program, and her own mother had been taught at home by her grandmother. Another mother remembered that "the best teacher in my high school" had often described to the class how she had learned "at the kitchen stool" while being taught at home by her parents.

Previous contacts with home schoolers were the exception, however. In less than half the cases did the parents I spoke with previously know someone personally who was home schooling. Of those who did know others, their contacts were generally through church.

Given that radio and TV programs through which home schooling is publicized air during the day, and that women are traditionally more involved in networks that share childrearing information than are men, it is not surprising that it was usually the mother who first heard about home schooling. Less often, the parents learned about home schooling together from friends or through reading. Only one father that I interviewed heard about home schooling first at a minister's conference and then introduced the idea to his wife.

Deciding

Regardless of the many rational reasons they later gave for home schooling, the parents' decision to teach their own children rarely was the culmination of long and careful deliberation. Home schooling was a novel idea for virtually all of these parents, yet many told of emotionally committing themselves to teaching their

children at home soon after learning that this would be possible.

For example, three of the families I met during the study were actively seeking alternatives to the schools their children were attending when they first heard about home education. In each of these families, a child was having considerable academic or emotional trouble in school. Spurred perhaps by the urgency of getting their children out of an undesirable situation, these families decided immediately upon hearing about home schooling that they had found the solution to their problems. In these parents' words,

> I didn't know what we were going to do, but I knew that we had to do something. A friend said, "I don't see that you have a problem at all. Why don't you do home schooling?" When she mentioned that, it was like something clicked in me that said, "Yes, this is what this is all about. This is what we are supposed to do."

> We came across someone that had read Dr. Raymond Moore's books. They gave us some tapes from when he was on James Dobson's program. We listened to those and we just couldn't believe that there was anything like that possible. It just totally flipped us. It hit us also that that was for our family.

> [An] interview that I read with John Holt inspired me tremendously. This is a possibility? I was a little scared of it at first. It was a new idea. I talked to my

husband right away about it, and he said, "I know we're going to do this. Now we have to talk ourselves into it so we're not scared to death." Essentially, I knew we were going to do this.

Only after this initial, emotional commitment to home schooling, did these parents begin reading about home schooling or seeking information from others. The first mother quoted above described this as a process of confirming a decision that had already been made:

> We got John Holt's *Teach Your Own* and that was all I really needed to rationally go along with what I knew we wanted to do.

This process of rationalization was short for two of these couples who withdrew their children from school almost immediately. The third couple chose to delay withdrawing their children from school until they had learned more about home education.

The decision was also made quickly for other parents who were deciding where to send their children to kindergarten when they first heard about home schooling. Faced with impending deadlines for enrollment, these parents often decided to home school before they felt fully ready. In the words of one of the mothers of a kindergarten-aged child taught at home:

> We were just thinking about it last year, but last summer it was really push comes to shove because he had to decide if we were going to send her to kindergarten or not.

Sometimes particular circumstances helped to precipitate the decision to home school and the eventual withdrawal of the children from school. In one family, the children had missed school for several weeks because of illness in the family. Their father recounted how they were ahead of their class when they returned to school because they had kept up with their work while they were away. The parents then decided that their children could accomplish more at home than they could at school.

In another instance, the family had come from out of state to live with relatives for what was expected to be a brief period between jobs. The parents had been thinking about home schooling for several years, and they decided to try teaching their children at home between moves instead of enrolling their children in a school for only a few months. When the time between jobs lasted longer than had been expected, they simply continued working with their children at home.

Other parents who were not actively seeking alternatives for their children similarly decided to home school soon after learning about the option, but many of these parents did not take their children out of school immediately because they were uncertain that home schooling was legal. As several parents explained:

> Our next big hurdle was finding out how we could do it, because you just couldn't walk in and say, "I'm going to home school", although I didn't know that at the time. That took us from Christmas until the start of the next school year.

We wanted to do it but didn't know how. At the last minute, we finally enrolled her in Christian school. And then that Spring was really the first time we learned how some people were able to home school legally by forming a private school. We went to a meeting of North Carolinians for Home Education, met a couple of other families from the area, and we said, "Why don't we just do it!" So that was the beginning. And the rest is history!

The Delconte case [the case in which the Supreme Court formally recognized the legality of home education] had not yet been decided, and with the elections a year ago, we felt that if Martin got in [for governor], it would probably be OK, but if he didn't, home schooling probably would not be very popular. I was really afraid to try it out.

Other obstacles also sometimes delayed the start of home schooling after the initial commitment had been made. For one mother, opposition to their decision from relatives compounded the frustration of an uncertain legal situation:

During that year before we knew how to register as a private school, we had to deal with my step-father who is a public school teacher. He just blew up, and at that point, I just thought, "I can't face him plus the

> state of North Carolina and try to figure out how to home school, so at that point, we just put her into a Christian school. It was just too much pressure.

Most often, parents who had decided to teach their own children because they objected morally to what their children were being taught in school were among those who waited to withdraw their children until they had cleared such legal or personal obstacles. These parents who decided to home school because they believed that schools were anti-Chritian were less likely to withdraw their children from school impulsively than were parents whose children were experiencing academic or social difficulties in school.

While most of the parents that I interviewed had made the decision to teach their own children rather quickly after first learning about the option, other parents planned to home school from the time their children were very young. As several mothers explained, home education was a natural outgrowth of their child-rearing philosophies:

> I think we just realized that he was really an early talker and an easy child and would sit for hours and always wanted to read books. I think that it's just a natural growth from being parents to know that this child is going to know all there is to know.

> We never really considered putting Adam in school. It never really entered our minds. We lived in the mountains, and it was really rural. And when it came

down to kids his age going, we just said that we weren't going to send him.

Starting out: consequences of decisions made quickly. While the specific circumstances leading up to the decision to home school vary from family to family, there are several common patterns that emerge from their accounts of these decisions. First, the parents often made quick, uninformed decisions to home school. Christian parents often explained their sudden certainty that they should home school as confirmation from God that they were doing the right thing for their children.

Even those parents who did postpone their decision until they had learned more did not spend the time in the interim rationally weighing the pros and cons of home education. Virtually none of the parents had access to persons or materials that are critical of home education, since the available books were all written by home-school advocates and are decidedly favorable. Opposition to their decision from family or friends was rarely grounded in anything more substantive than speculation of the damage that would befall the children if they did not attend school. Thus, the parents were not weighing rational arguments for and against home schooling when they made their decision. Instead, the parents explained that the decision was most often made intuitively. When decisions were more informed, the only additional input was often from the parents' limited reading or from the testimony of friends who had been home schooling for a relatively short period of time.

Secondly, parents' expectations of what home schooling would be like were often highly personalized. At the point of decision, few of the parents understood what would be involved in the day-to-day education of their children. Although many of the parents read Moore's or Holt's books for information about how to home school, they often explained that they did not agree with the advice given. The parents would cite these home schooling advocates as support for their decision, but otherwise usually found little of practical value from their books. Consequently, the parents were not deciding on specific home schooling practices recommended in their early reading by Moore or Holt, but rather were deciding more for the *principle* of teaching their children at home.

Finally, the transition to the parents' new role as academic teacher was usually abrupt. As noted, many parents began teaching soon after deciding to do so. Those who waited for a time after deciding usually did so because of the ambiguity of the legal situation or because of other personal circumstances, not because they felt that they needed time to learn more about teaching and learning. The parents therefore acquired their role as teacher of their children in the process of working with their children.

In summary, the parents made their decision to home school independently of the advice or guidance of others. Further, since they had little objective information about what home schooling would be like, the parents explained that they were making the decision intuitively. They neither sought the advice of others nor followed the advice offered by advocates of home education. Their

independence and their "intuititive" decision making contintued to characterize their early days of home schooling. The first steps taken by the parents in assuming the role of Teacher will be discussed next.

Learning the Ropes

Having decided to home school, the parents faced many more decisions as they actually began teaching. They first had to learn how to avoid legal prosecution. They had to learn how to choose among the many materials available to them, how to schedule their days, and what they should teach their children. Most parents new to home schooling learned these things through their affiliations with other home schoolers. What the parents learned in their first months of home schooling and how it was learned will be discussed in greater detail.

Untangling the Legal Maze

There was considerable confusion about the legality of home schooling in the state prior to a State Supreme Court decision in May of 1985 that formally affirmed that home schools could legally be considered as private schools. Before this decision, parents could learn about how to home school legally only through a "grapevine" of other parents and sympathetic school officials. State education officials, while not formally advocating the prosecution of home schoolers, also did not explicitly inform local school officials of thei legal loopholes which allowed parents to home school legally. Families in some school systems were therefore sometimes harassed or taken to court, while those in other systems home schooled with the

knowledge, if not the approval of local officials. Parents new to home schooling were understandably concerned about whether they would encounter legal trouble for home schooling.

This situation had two consequences for home schoolers and their organizations. First, the legal ambiguity and the very real threat of legal prosecution from local officials who were not aware of or did not accept the unwritten policies of the state contributed to a sense of distrust and defensiveness on the part of home schoolers. Much of the talk during meetings of home schoolers concentrated on the legal situation: parents new to home schooling would ask more experienced parents how to avoid prosecution, or the finer points of the state's private school legislation as it applied to home schooling would be debated for an entire meeting. Guest speakers at state meetings told of how their families had been harassed or how difficult it was for pro-home schooling legislation to be passed in other states because of opposition from legislators. A major portion of nearly every meeting of home schoolers that I attended was devoted to legal concerns. This fear of prosecution persisted in the year following the Supreme Court decision.

Second, prior to the Supreme Court decision, home schooling families had to formally organize with other home schoolers, both for the dissemination of legal and other information and to qualify under the state's policies as private schools. It was through these affiliations that parents also learned about becoming teachers of their children.

Learning to be Teachers

At their first state, regional, or local meetings, new home schoolers would raise questions and concerns about their work with their children. The answers provided by more experienced parents in the organization were an important part of the new home schooler's socialization into their role as teacher. Futhermore the questions that were not publicly raised and the issues that were seldom discussed are also significant in their absence.

Choosing materials. An issue that was rarely formally discussed at meetings of home schoolers was that of materials that parents used to teach their children. Moore's and Holt's books both advised parents that instruction should be built around the child's everyday interests and experiences, nearly all of the parents purchased structured, commercial curriculum programs to help them to organize their teaching. One mother spoke for many others when she explained during an interview why she used commercial materials in spite of that advice of home schooling advocates that a less-structured approach might be more appropriate:

> My husband says I'm curriculum dependent, but I don't have the time or the know-how to figure out for myself what I should be covering.

While parents new to home schooling learned quickly that most other parents did use commercial materials, the information exchanged among home schoolers about materials was largely superficial. Parents would often ask one another what materials they were using, but rarely discussed the advantage of one program

over another. Samples of materials were sometimes displayed at larger meetings, but the criterion for selecting among the materials were never explicitly discussed. The leadership at all levels of the organization seemed to carefully side-step endorsement of any particular program, because, as one state-level officer told a meeting of parents, "one family's preferences might be another family's complaint." New home schoolers learned, then, that norms of independence extended to choosing materials for their children. As was their initial decision to home school, decisions about materials were made with little input from others.

The most direct advice given to parents about materials was the suggestion made often by leaders that new home schoolers might feel most comfortable with a correspondence course when first starting out. Nearly half of the parents I interviewed had, in fact, used a correspondence program when they first began teaching their children. Most commomly, these parents enrolled with the Christian Liberty Academy program.

The parents' reasons for chosing this program had little to do with the academic content of the materials but centered more around their need they felt for help in managing their children's education:

> I feel that I really need the help from Christian Liberty because I don't feel qualified to do all the grading and the testing.

> We went with Christian Liberty this year because

we were new and wanted a structured course. We thought it would be easier to send things to them to grade.

We felt that we wanted to be accountable to someone else. Number one, it causes us to be more disciplined in following through. If we knew that we didn't have to send anything in, there might be a lot more times when we'd say, "Oh, let's forget this". I think that a lot of time, that one of the dangers of home education. Because we're accountable to Christian Liberty, it causes us to fulfill our responsibilities. It is a protective thing for us.

The parents who chose to work with Christian Liberty Academy were among the least secure in their abilities to manage the education of their children alone, yet the norms of independence superceded the parents' need to learn more about how to teach their children. The correspondence program, then, fulfilled two of the parents' needs: the structure of the program provided them with the technical assistance they sought while still allowing them to maintain their independence from the other parents or educators from whom they otherwise might have sought advice.

Other Christian parents not enrolling in correspondence programs simply ordered the same curriculum materials their children would have used had they enrolled in local Christian schools. Two mothers explained:

> We know what the Abekka [a curriculum for Christian schools] curriculum is like. They used that last year. So we're going to stick to that.

> He's been in it for two years, and we had some of the materials available to us, plus our neighbor was a teacher in that program, so not knowing anything, we thought we'd keep him in the same thing that he'd started.

Another way that parents chose their materials was to simply order what they knew that someone else was using. As one of these mothers explained, she ordered materials not because she agreed with why her acquaintances chose them, but merely because she respected the judgement of these friends:

> I chose this program because my friend had used it. She had liked the looks of it. She was a teacher at one time. I also heard that Catherine and Melinda [two local home schooling organizers] were using it. That sort of steered us toward it.

The Christian parents were often most concerned that lessons support their religious beliefs. In contrast to their very general descriptions of the academic content of the materials they had chosen, their evaluation of their materials' religious content was often much more specific.

Notably absent in the many reasons that parents give for choosing materials were criterion for judging the quality of the academic content. Even more noteworthy, however, is the absence of explicitly *personal* reasons for chosing materials. Though the parents explained during interviews that they chose to home school to provide an education that best suits their children and their family, any unique needs or preferences of family were rarely considered in the selection of materials. Although they learn in their early days of "learning the ropes" of home schooling, that the selection of materials is a personal, family matter, materials are often selected on more impersonal criterion: their ease of use, their inclusion of explicitly spiritual content, or because of the endorsement of a school or acquintance. Few independent judgements were made about the materials through which parents organized their independent home education.

Learning how to teach. Parents were also generally on their own in learning *how* to teach. During the short time between deciding to home school and beginning, there was little time to prepare for the tasks which they were assuming. Once they had begun to work with their children, however, parents often explained home schooling meetings that they were getting frustrated and discouraged. More experienced parents would respond with non-critical support and encouragement. The parents stopped short, however, of giving one another specific advice about how to teach.

Perhaps the best example of the non-specific advice given to

frustrated new home schoolers was when they were reminded to rely on God when they are confused or discouraged. An exchange that took place at a Central Christian Academy meeting just before the opening of school in the fall of 1985 illustrates this advice. Sounding somewhat desperate, a woman who was at her first school meeting had told the group that she did not feel qualified to teach her adolescent daughter. Mary, the "principal" of the school, replied:

> If you felt qualified, you'd be in trouble. It's just like being a parent, or marriage, or anything else. Without Christ, it doesn't work, so if you did feel qualified, you would be in trouble.

Mary then went on to explain to the woman that regardless of her feelings, it was her *responsiblity* to educate her own children. Eddie, who was co-leading the meeting, agreed that God would provide the skill. As he told the woman,

> If God has established us to be educators, then he'll enable us also. If you make a commitment, the Lord will equip you with the knowledge, the time, and working out your schedule.

The other parents in the group nodded in agreement during this exchange. After thinking about what Mary and Eddie had said for several seconds, the mother who had raised the question smiled and said, "You've told me just what I needed to hear."

A similar exchange occurred several months later at a school meeting in which veteran home schoolers suggested scripture passages that might encourage parents who had become discouraged.

Sandra, a mother who had been home schooling for only a few months, told the group that sometimes she was so frustrated that she felt like quitting. What followed was a reminder to the whole group that home schooling was to be a spiritual as well as an academic endeavor. Barbara, a mother who had been home schooling for several years, began the exchange:

> "I've found a verse in James that is helpful: 'Let he who lacks wisdom ask.'" Sandra replied, "Oh, I'm living by that." Alice, who was also new to home schooling added, "The word also says in Deuteronomy that man perishes from a lack of knowledge." Mary then said, "That's the point, that we're doing this before God, but sometimes, when it's just my daughter and the Lord in the room, I say, 'OK, Lord, show me what to do.'"

This brief conversation demonstrates both the level of advice given to new home schoolers and the level of advice sought. In both this exchange and the one discussed previously, the questioner appeared to be satisfied and encouraged by the admonition to rely more on God for answers to the puzzling problems of teaching a child. The spiritual advice about how to overcome specific frustrations remained ambiguous and non-specific, but it was just such advice that the newcomers learned to expect.

A second strategy for answering new home schooler's general concerns was to remind the questioner of how unacceptable the alternative of traditional schooling was. As an example, parents had asked a guest speaker at an early state-wide meeting about how

children would fare if they went back to school. The speaker essentially laughed off the question by explaining to parents how bad public schools are:

> They'll test the child, and most always they test a year or two higher than anybody there. .... Basically, the A students in the public schools are a year or two behind a child in a Christian curriculum. Average two years behind.... And that's the A student in the public school. So it's going to be real hard to cause your child not to do well.

A variation of this occurred when questions were answered with general complaints that the questioner's concern shouldn't have to be an issue since the matter is not an obvious concern for other schools. An example of this type of response came at a meeting of Central Christian Academy in September when a new home schooler said that she was afraid that her daughter's test scores would drop during her first year at home. Another mother replied,

> Well, what about the children not learning in the public schools? If their test scores are low they don't do anything to the teacher.

Neither of these replies answered the questioner's concerns directly, yet in deflecting their questions, important norms were communicated. The parents' were not told how to overcome their specific difficulties, but were instead taught two things about the significance of apparently low public school standards for home schoolers.

First, the responding parents implied that the achievement levels of public schools should appropriately be employed as a standard for measuring the sucess of home schools. Throughout the study, in interviews, in informal conversations, and in articles in books and newspapers, the progress of home schooled children was compared with that of children in public schools. There was an irony in these comparisons: the parents often criticized the schools for having low standards, yet they continued to measure their own success against those standards. Furthermore, since these comparisons are often based on "horror stories" the parents have read or heard about public schools, home schooling inevitably comes out on top. New home schoolers were given few other guidelines for determining whether their teaching is successful.

Second, since the parents believed that the superiority of home schooling has been amply demonstrated by such comparisons, they also believed that opposition to home schooling from public educators was hypocritical. Since the superiority of home schooling was considered common knowledge among the home schoolers, the parents often assumed that public educators must also know that home schooling is "better" than traditional schooling. Efforts to regulate or restrict home schooling were then interpreted by many home schoolers as opposition to the values and beliefs they sought to teach their children, not to their teaching methods. Their distrust of public educators was therefore strengthened.

These comparisons served to reinforce for parents their decision to teach their own children. Telling new home schoolers, as one

father did, that "the schools are so bad that you'd be doing better if you do nothing at all", may strengthen the parents' resolve to keep their children at home, but such advice did not help them learn what to do with their children once they are there.

These indirect answers to requests for help also reinforced the norm of independence for parents new to home schooling. When the work that parents did with their children was rarely specifically discussed at meetings newcomers learned that home schooling is primarily a private enterprise. In spite of the considerable frustration that parents reported experiencing, I did not observe a single instance of a parent offering another parent suggestions about teaching, nor did parents tell me during interviews about seeking such advice from one another outside of these meetings. Few of the parents have read anything about learning or teaching except the Moore's books or the teacher's manuals of their curriculum packages and fewer still have sought the advice of educators or other resource persons. For these parents, home schooling was essentially a family enterprise.

In summary, experienced home schoolers taught new parents about the shortcomings of public schools, about God's expectations for them, and about the oppostion they faced from those hostile to home schooling, but beyond this, the parents offered little else beyond ideological bolstering. For parents new to home schooling, learning to teach their children was most likely to be an ongoing, private experience of trial and error.

Conclusions

The decision by the parents studied to teach their own children can better be understood if home schooling is placed in the broader context of the families' beliefs and values. These are families who strongly believe in the "traditional" family, and who further believe that this family structure is under attack from many fronts. As such, their decision to home school is not only a pedagogical decision, but is also a public declaration of the parents' belief in the institution of the family. Assuming responsibility for the education of their children not only resolves problems their children might have been having in school, but also stengthens the family relative to other institutions in the child's life.

The assumption of the teaching role is not without problems. In their role as parents, the home schoolers, like other parents, are not dependent upon expert knowledge. Although child raising is strongly influenced by current social norms and values, parents enjoy almost complete autonomy in the raising of their children. Except for compulsory schooling and the prohibition of the abuse of children, there is very little public interference in the relationships between children and their parents, and very little public intrusion into the private life of the family.

The situation changes, however, as the parents assume responsibilities for teaching their own children. The education of children has become a highly bureaucratic, highly professionalized enterprise. The relationship between teachers and students has become increasingly impersonal as schools have become larger, and the curriculum has grown ever broader. Furthermore, education

has come to be viewed more and more as a public, not merely a private good as school effectiveness is measured by such gauges as industrial productivity and the relative strength of national economies.

While all parents teach their children, home schooling parents set out to assume the more formalized role of Teacher. Assuming this Teaching role, however, invites public intrusion into their private families, and it is precisely such intrusion that home schoolers are attempting to resist in their efforts to preserve the institution of the family. Home schooling parents learn to manage this conflict by defining their teaching role in strongly parental terms.

As they learn to be home schoolers, then, parents learn that if they are good parents they will be good teachers. Thus, the parents learn, there is little need for expert knowledge in teaching their children, because parents perform their roles "intuitively" or with God's guidance. Assistance from friends of home schooling is therefore not sought, because the family is a private and autonomous institution; converesely, attempts to regulate home schooling are interpreted by the parents as interference with the family.

Nonetheless, during their first months and years as home schoolers, the parents may become frustrated as they encounter unfamiliar materials, technical subject matter, and the disapproval of friends and family. But in becoming home schoolers, the parents learn to resolve these frustrations intuitively and independently,

much as they meet other challenges they face as parents. More technical, pedagogical concerns are secondary.